



WHAT DOES HEALTH MEAN TO YOU?

ANSWERING THE QUESTIONS WE ASK OURSELVES

We all want to be healthy. But what does being in good health mean, and how do we know we're doing the things that will get us there? The answers aren't always as simple as we'd like, and each of us may need help in finding the health formula that fits our individual circumstances.

This can be true even if you're diligent about keeping up with the latest news on what's good for you and what's bad. Every day, researchers provide more information about what keeps us healthy. But there are times when the experts seem to contradict each other. Are eggs good for us or bad for us? Do we need eight glasses of water a day or is that too much? With so many sources of information, finding answers can get confusing.

If you want to cut through confusion over what good health is and how to achieve it, time-tested and trustworthy sources are essential. Here are a few examples of health questions we ask ourselves, and where to find good answers.

- » **How much should I weigh?** It's generally accepted that weighing too much is bad for you. Obesity – a condition of excess body weight due to an abnormal accumulation of fat – has been linked to serious illnesses such as diabetes, stroke, cancers and heart disease. But simply standing on the scale won't tell you if you're too heavy. Various factors complicate things. More muscle is preferable to more fat, for example, but muscle weighs more than fat. There are rough indicators of being overweight. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says a waist size of more than 40 inches for a man and 35 inches for a non-pregnant woman is a warning of a risk of obesity-related illnesses. Your body mass index (BMI) – a ratio based on your weight and height – is a more precise measure of whether you're at a healthy weight. The CDC offers a BMI calculator at this link: <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/healthyweight/assessing/index.htm>.
- » **How hard do I have to push myself to get fitter?** We associate a slow, steady heartbeat with good health. We hear about marathoners and other elite athletes whose heartbeats per minute are much lower than our own. But while a trained physician may determine something about your health by listening to your heart, you can't tell much simply by taking your pulse. If you have an exercise routine that you're using to improve your fitness, however, using your target heart rate provides a measure of whether you're doing enough to reach your goal. (Consult a physician before starting an exercise program.) And while your target heart rate is based on a percentage of your maximum heart rate, reaching the maximum is not the goal. A heart rate of 50 to 85 percent of your maximum indicates you're exerting yourself enough to become more fit. A rough estimate of your maximum heart rate is 220 minus your age. For a more precise target heart rate range, check out the Mayo Clinic's target heart rate calculator at this link: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/target-heart-rate/SM00083>.
- » **Should I switch from cigarettes to a "safer" tobacco?** Tobacco's negative impacts on health could not be clearer, but rationalizations about cigarettes and other tobacco products abound. People talk about "safer" ways of smoking, such as not inhaling, switching to "light," low-tar brands or hand-rolling their own. Cigars are touted as healthier alternative to cigarettes. The same is said of smokeless tobacco products. The American Cancer Society is plain on the subject. Tobacco products damage your health. For information you need to know, check out this American Cancer Society link: http://www.cancer.org/docroot/PED/content/PED_10_2x_Questions_About_Smoking_Tobacco_and_Health.asp.
- » **Do I have a mental illness, or am I just feeling emotional?** Many of us see mental health and mental illness less well defined than physical health and illnesses. But the definitions offered in the 1999 U.S. Surgeon General's Report on Mental Health are pretty precise. Mental health is defined as, "The successful performance of mental function, resulting in productive activities, fulfilling relationships with other people, and the ability to adapt to change and to cope with adversity." The report says mental illness "refers collectively to all mental disorders, which are health conditions characterized by alteration in thinking, mood, or behavior (or some combination thereof) associated with distress and/or impaired functioning." How well someone functions is central to both

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definitions. If your mental or emotional problems prevent you from functioning the way you want for an extended period, it may be time to get help. Your EAP is a good place to start. For general information about mental health, Mental Health America, a national advocacy organization, offers mental health information based on specific needs at <http://www.nmha.org/go/get-info/>.

Of course, determining whether you're in good health and whether you're doing what you need to do to maintain your health involves many more issues. Information is a powerful tool in the process, but taking action based on what you learn about health and healthy living is the key. After all, knowing how to define health isn't nearly as important as knowing how being healthy feels.

This article is for informational and self-help purposes only. It should not be treated as a substitute for financial, medical, psychiatric, psychological or behavioral healthcare advice, nor as a substitute for consultation with a qualified professional.

Do you have questions about how to measure your health and how to change your behavior in order to live healthier? Your EAP has answers!

To help you and your family lead healthier, happier lives, your EAP provides support in many areas, including the following:

- » Emotional health
- » Nutrition and physical fitness
- » Alcohol and substance abuse
- » Relationships with co-workers

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